



NEWS & REPORTS

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THE EARLY GRADES

New tool inventories math skills

Schools sent kits to help K-2 students

When kindergarten-, first-, and second-grade teachers return from the holiday break, a package with a new tool to help assess the math skills of Idaho's youngest students will be waiting for them.

The tool is the K-2 Mathematics Inventory (K2MI) and will be shipped in December to elementary schools in Idaho.

The K2MI is a one-on-one assessment tool that will allow the teacher to consider not only the child's answers, but also the methods by which the child approaches the questions.

The kit includes a manual and item booklet as well as a teacher instructional supplement and all of the mathematical manipulatives (hands on) necessary to administer the inventory. The K2MI provides information about student understanding of key elements of Idaho math standards in the early grades.

K2MI development

The K2MI was developed and piloted by the Department of Education with assistance from many Idaho educators and the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory staff. State Department of Education staffer Pat White helped coordinate the project.

"The purpose of the inventory is to help primary teachers determine student understanding and growth in mathematical knowledge in order to guide instruction," White said.

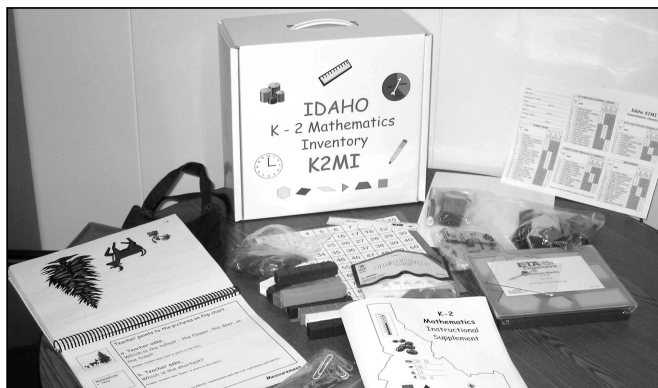
"K2MI is not an assessment required by federal or state regulations or rules."

White said the K2MI is designed to be given one-on-one with the students similar to the Idaho Reading Indicator.

K2MI content

K2MI is based on the state math standards.

The inventory has sections for five content strands - basic arithmetic; estimation and



K-2 Math Inventory kits will be mailed to Idaho elementary schools in December and January from the State Department of Education. The kits were printed and assembled by Idaho Correctional Industries program, which provides vocational training to inmates.

accurate computation; concepts and language of algebra, functions, and mathematical models; concepts and principles of geometry; data analysis, probability, and statistics; and concepts and principles of measurement.

Standards from the sixth math strand - reasoning and problem solving - are imbedded questions for the other strands.

K2MI use

Manipulatives are used throughout the inventory providing a hands-on assessment that simulates hands-on instruction that is vital during the primary grades.

Because the inventory is divided into five strands, it may be administered in one to five sittings.

This allows for the adaptability needed in assessing young students with varied attention spans, White said.

Schools and school districts have the flexibility to use this inventory to meet the needs of their students, White said, adding that when the K2MI is given as a pre-test, it can provide information for the

A review from the classroom

Lucy Hahn, a Boise School District teacher, was involved in the development of the K2MI and has used it with her students.

Hahn said the vision of creating an inventory that would give teachers information about their students' conceptual understanding of mathematics in order to guide instruction is what many teachers are seeking.

"While piloting the inventory in my class I was able to 'see' my students' thinking. I was able to watch how they solved a problem or computed an answer. I discovered that many of my students resort to counting when solving a problem, which tells me that I need to stress various strategies for finding an answer. These would be using the doubles facts, making a 10, near doubles, using addition to subtract, etc. Not one student was able to answer the geometry question about symmetry or solid shapes, so I know just where to start when we reach that unit."

"The insights that I gained into individual student's thinking will guide me throughout the year. Paper-pencil assessments only let me know if the child has the right answer. This powerful tool gives me information about individual thinking and understanding which is far more beneficial. And I love that the information is for me, the classroom teacher, to use when making instructional decisions in my classroom."

teacher to prescribe interventions or extensions for students, and when given as a post-test, it can be used to monitor the effectiveness of instruction.

Principal earns national award

By Eric Muhr

for News & Reports

Not every educator gets to hire his former students. Randy Jensen, principal at William Thomas Middle School in American Falls, said that's one of the rewards for sticking it out in a single place.

"Right up front, I knew I was here for a long time," Jensen said. "I wanted to live in a small town. I really have a commitment to the success of this school."

Jensen, a 20-year veteran at William Thomas, has been principal for 16 years, following four years at the school as a teacher. Now he hires teachers. "On my staff right now, I have four that were students," Jensen said. "They can't get past calling me Mr. Jensen."

His commitment is paying off in other ways as well. Jensen recently was named National Middle School Principal of the Year. He's Idaho's first administrator to win the award.

"It's a real nice honor for my school," Jensen said, explaining that the recognition comes, in part, because of the work of his staff. "It takes everyone's effort to make a good school."

And it is hard work. Jensen said contemporary culture is different from when he was a kid, bringing unique challenges for today's teachers.

"Our biggest struggle is unmotivated students," Jensen said. "Kids have a lot going on in their lives. School isn't always the most important thing for them."

Jensen said he would love to eliminate the tough issues - at home and in society - that many of today's students must face. "I wish I could make it a perfect world for every kid."

But Jensen claimed that even if he can't fix the world, it is possible to reach individual kids, to make a difference, no matter what they face. He said it boils down to relationship.



Jensen

Continued on Page 2

Schools recognized for growth, closing gaps in AYP

In December, several schools were recognized for their gains in student performance. The state announced "distinguished" schools that have made gains in closing achievement gaps in reading and math. Also recognized were schools that made "additional yearly growth" in reading and math.

Distinguished Schools for Math

Blackfoot School District, RidgeCrest Elementary
Cassia County Joint School District, Raft River Junior/Senior High
Coeur d'Alene School District, Woodland Middle School
Council School District, Council Junior/Senior High
Fremont County School District, North Fremont Junior/Senior High
Preston Joint School District, Oakwood Elementary
West Bonner County School District, Priest River Elementary

Distinguished Schools for Reading

Boundary County School District, Valley View Elementary School
Coeur d'Alene School District, Woodland Middle School
Fremont County Joint School District, North Fremont Junior/Senior High School

Jefferson Joint School District, Jefferson Elementary School
Madison School District, Kennedy Elementary School
Minidoka County Joint School District, Paul Elementary School
Nampa School District, Parkridge Elementary School
Pocatello School District, Wilcox Elementary School
Post Falls School District, Prairie View Elementary School
Salmon School District, Salmon Junior High School

Additional Yearly Growth Rewards

Blackfoot School District, RidgeCrest Elementary School
Boise Independent School District, Cole Elementary School
Boise Independent School District, Lowell Elementary School
Boise Independent School District, Shadow Hills Elementary School
Boise Independent School District, Valley View Elementary School
Bonneville School District, Falls Valley Elementary School
Boundary Joint County School District, Valley View Elementary School

Cascade School District, Cascade Junior/Senior High School
Cassia County Joint School District, Declo Elementary School
Cassia County Joint School District, Oakley Junior/Senior High School
Coeur d'Alene School District, Bryan Elementary School
Coeur d'Alene School District, Hayden Lake Elementary School
Coeur d'Alene School District, Woodland Middle School
Cottonwood Joint School District, Prairie Middle School
Council School District, Council Junior/Senior High School
Culdesac Joint School District, Culdesac School
Emmett Independent School District, Emmett High School
Filer School District, Filer Elementary School
Filer School District, Filer Middle School
Firth School District, Firth Middle School
Fremont County School District, North Fremont Junior/Senior High School

Gooding Joint School District, Gooding Elementary School
Grace Joint School District, Grace Junior/Senior High School
Grangeville Joint School District, Grangeville High School
Idaho Falls School District, A.H. Bush Elementary School
Idaho Falls School District, Fox Hollow Elementary School
Idaho Falls School District, Linden Park Elementary School
Idaho Falls School District, Temple View Elementary School
Jerome Joint School District, Central Elementary School
Jerome Joint School District, Horizon Elementary School
Kamiah Joint School District, Kamiah Middle School
Kellogg School District, Sunnyside Elementary
Kimberly School District, Kimberly Middle School
Kootenai Joint School District, Kootenai Junior/Senior High School
Kuna Joint School District, Fremont Teed Elementary School
Lake Pend Oreille School District, Sagle Elementary School
Lakeland Joint School District, Betty Kiefer Elementary School
Lakeland Joint School District, John Brown Elementary School
Lakeland Joint School District, Timberlake Junior/Senior High School
Mackay Joint School District, Mackay Junior/Senior High School

Madison School District, Adams Elementary School
Marsh Valley Joint School District, Mt. View Elementary School
Melba Joint School District, Melba Elementary School
Meridian Joint School District, Chief Joseph Elementary School
Meridian Joint School District, Linder Elementary School
Meridian Joint School District, Lowell Scott Middle School
Meridian Joint School District, Peregrine Elementary School
Meridian Joint School District, Silver Sage Elementary School
Meridian Joint School District, Spalding Elementary School
Meridian Joint School District, Summerwind Elementary School
Minidoka County Joint School District, Acequia Elementary School
Moscow School District, A.B. McDonald Elementary School
Moscow School District, Moscow Junior High School
Mountain Home School District, Liberty Elementary School
Mountain Home School District, North Elementary School
Nampa School District, Parkridge Elementary School
Oneida County School District, Malad Elementary School
Oneida County School District, Malad Senior High School
Oronofe Joint School District, Oronofe Junior High School
Pocatello School District, Chubbuck Elementary School
Pocatello School District, Lewis & Clark Elementary School
Post Falls School District, Muller Trail Elementary School
Post Falls School District, Prairie View Elementary School
Post Falls School District, Sellice Elementary School
Rockland School District, Rockland Public School
St. Maries School District, Heyburn Elementary School
Soda Springs School District, Tigert Middle School
Sugar-Salem Joint District, Sugar-Salem Junior High School
Twin Falls School District, Lincoln Elementary School
Twin Falls School District, Sawtooth Elementary School
Vallivue School District, Birch Elementary School
West Bonner County School District, Priest River Elementary School
West Jefferson School District, West Jefferson High School
West Side Joint School District, Harold Lee Middle School

Idaho educators honored

Stan Cope

American Falls High School art teacher Stan Cope was named Idaho Art Teacher of the Year for 2004-05 by the Idaho Art Education Association. Cope has taught for 38 years and will retire in September. Cope teaches introduction to art, introduction to drawing, introduction to painting, introduction to pottery and 3D art.

Melinda Harris

Preston School District fifth-grade teacher Melinda Harris received the Idaho Social Studies Educator award for 2003-04.

Harris has taught at Oakwood Elementary School for eight years. The Idaho Council for the Social Studies gives the award.



Mary Jo Pearson

Pocatello School District first-grade teacher Mary Jo Pearson was named Idaho's No Child Left Behind American Star of Teaching.

The award is given by the U.S. Department of Education. Pearson teaches at Lewis and Clark Elementary School. Pearson has a master's degree in reading and emphasizes reading as the foundation for learning in all subject areas.



James Coughlin

James Coughlin, a teacher at Capital High School, has been selected to receive the Idaho Council of Teachers of English Teacher of Excellence Award. He received the award at a luncheon in Indianapolis on Nov. 20. The National Council of Teachers of English works to advance teaching, research and student achievement in English language arts at all scholastic levels.



Barbara Olic-Hamilton

Barbara Olic-Hamilton, an English teacher at Boise High School, has been selected to visit Lubny, Ukraine, as part of the 2004 United States-Eurasia Awards for Excellence in Teaching program.

Thirty-six teachers were selected in a national competition to represent the United States in this program.



Olic-Hamilton will visit schools, observe classes and work with award-winning teachers and schools in Lubny. She also participated in an international conference for educators in July at California State University, Chico.

Jan Zollinger

Jan Zollinger, a teacher of the blind at the Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind (ISDB) in Gooding was awarded the 2004 Distinguished Educator of Blind Children Award by the National Federation of the Blind (NFB).

As the recipient of this national award, Zollinger received an expense-paid trip to the convention, a check for \$1,000, and a plaque.

Robert Beckwith Renee McNally

Two Idaho teachers have been named Environmental Educators of the Year by The Idaho Environmental Education Association.

Robert E. Beckwith teaches science at Mountain View High School in Meridian. Since 1972, Beckwith has used outdoor teaching methods to enhance his students' learning. His students have used jet boats, backcountry air services, and their own feet to access many remote study locations.

Renee McNally teaches second grade at Lena Whitmore Elementary School in Moscow. McNally gained the attention for her projects, guiding students through investigations of local habitat. Last year at the Moscow Renaissance Fair, McNally's students designed a "canoe-on-wheels" to pull visitors through a three-dimensional mural of each habitat.

Beckwith and McNally each received a certificate, a scholarship for professional development and lifetime membership in IdEEA.

Krista Jones Vana Richards Elaine Asmus

Three outstanding science teachers were honored in October.

Two teachers were named state finalists for the Presidential Award in Science: Krista Jones, Bellevue Elementary School, Blaine County School District; and Vana Richards, Carberry Intermediate School, Emmett School District.

Elaine Asmus, Snake River High School, Snake River School District, Blackfoot, was named Outstanding Biology Teacher of the Year.

The presidential award finalists will receive a one year membership in the National Science Teachers Association and Asmus receives a one-year membership in the National Association of Biology.

Carleen Baldwin Sue Darden Lois Standley

Three outstanding elementary teachers were honored in October as the state finalists for the Presidential Award in Math.

State finalists are:

Carleen Baldwin, Lapwai Elementary School, Lapwai School District.

Sue Darden, Meridian Middle School, Meridian School District.

Lois Standley, Bellevue Elementary School, Blaine County School District.

Rosanna Robbins

Post Falls School District psychologist Rosanna Robbins has been named Idaho School Psychologist of the Year by the Idaho School Psychologist Association.

Idaho Teacher of the Year nominees

Idaho only gets to pick one teacher to be the "Teacher of the Year." Each year the selection is difficult. Idaho's 2005 Teacher of the Year is Paula Conley, see story on next page. Below are the other outstanding teachers who were finalists for the recognition.



Atkins



Ballard



Bennion



Buch



Greeley



Hoge



Keezer



Patten



Richards



Rush



Sept



Smith

William Atkins

William Atkins teaches Residential Construction Technology at the Cassia Regional Technical Center, Cassia County School District. Atkins has over 21 years teaching experience.

Gail Ballard

Gail Ballard teaches sixth grade at Betty Kiefer Elementary, Lakeland Joint School District. Ballard says that it is her colleagues and students who continue to motivate her to excel in the field of education.

Deborah Bennion

Deborah Bennion teaches eighth grade Language Arts at Lewis and Clark Middle School, Meridian Joint School District.

Carol Briggs (No photo)

Carol Briggs teaches fourth grade at Birch Elementary, Vallivue School District. Briggs is active in the Idaho Council of Teachers of Mathematics, and feels that one of her greatest achievements is passing the love of mathematics on to her students.

Donna Buch

Donna Buch teaches fourth grade at Wilson Elementary, Caldwell School District. She has 26 years experience.

J. Neil Greeley

J. Neil Greeley teaches chemistry at Timberline High School, Boise School District. Greeley holds a Ph.D. in Physical Chemistry from the University of Notre Dame.

Sharon Hoge

Sharon Hoge teaches Drama and Law at Mountain View Middle School, Blackfoot School

District. Hoge has over 21 years experience.

Helen Keezer

Helen Keezer teaches 12th grade English at Century High School, Pocatello School District. Keezer has over 17 years experience.

Lea Kiely (No photo)

Lea Kiely teaches second grade at Camelot Elementary School, Lewiston School District. Kiely is an elementary teacher with over 30 years experience.

Justin Patten

Justin Patten teaches Agricultural Science and Technology Education at Snake River High School, Snake River School District.

Vana Richards

Vana Richards is a fifth grade teacher at Carberry Elementary, Emmett Joint School District. Richards has over 33 years experience. Richards' special interests are in the areas of math and science.

Patricia Rush

Patricia Rush teaches high school mathematics at Kendrick Jr/Sr High, Kendrick Joint School District. Rush has conducted leadership training in the area of Gifted/Talented, and is currently mentoring a new teacher.

Deena Smith

Deena Smith is a second-grade teacher at West Elementary School, Mountain Home School District.

Christine Sept

Chris Sept is an English teacher at Minico Senior High School, Minidoka County School District.

Idaho administrators honored

Jim Lewis

Jim Lewis, superintendent of the Blaine County School District was named 2005 Idaho Superintendent of the Year by the Idaho School Superintendents Association.



Byron Yankey

Byron Yankey was named 2004-05 Idaho's for National Distinguished Principal. Yankey is principal of Meridian Elementary School in the Meridian School



District. The award is given by the Idaho Association of Elementary School Principals.

Steve Copmann

Steve Copmann was named 2005 Outstanding Secondary School Principal - Middle Level by the Idaho Association of Secondary School Principals. Copmann is principal of Burley Junior High School in the Cassia County Joint School District.



Susan Scully

Susan Scully was named 2005 Outstanding Secondary School Assistant Principal by the Idaho Association of

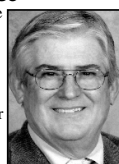
Secondary School Principals.

Scully is an assistant principal at Franklin Middle School in the Pocatello School District.



David Case

David Case was named the 2004 Outstanding Special Education Administrator by the Idaho Association of Special Education Administrators. Case has been the special education director in the Blackfoot School District since 1988.



Jensen

(Continued from Page 1)

"We need to make a personal connection with them," Jensen said. "That's one thing I look at when I hire teachers. It's one thing to have subject-area knowledge. It's another to like being around kids."

That's why Jensen got into education. "I started coaching baseball when I was 16," Jensen said. "That's when I realized I really liked being with kids."

He said going from coaching to teaching was a natural transition and an easy career choice.

"It's one career where you change people's lives," Jensen said. "You make a big impact. That's a big job, and with that, come really big rewards."

But he didn't give up coaching. In Jensen's last year as a teacher, his baseball team won the state championship.

And even though Jensen is out of the classroom, he's still spending as much time as he can with his students. One day a week, Jensen meets with the students in 6th, 7th or 8th grade, during their 30-minute advisory period.

The role of administrator, however, doesn't give Jensen as much time as he would like for students. He said much of his time goes to evaluation and support of teachers in his building, and it can be a thankless job.

That's part of why Jensen said this honor is particularly meaningful: "Administrators don't get a lot of compliments."

Other awards

If your association gave an award that is not included in this round up please email information to Allison Westfall at awestfal@sde.state.id.us.

HONORING EXCELLENCE

Coeur d'Alene's Conley named Teacher of the Year

Bringing a dog to school started as a student management experiment in Paula Conley's classroom. But Bentley, the dog, was such a significant help that Conley made the canine her classroom aide for eight years.

"He did a lot to establish a warm, comfortable feeling in my room," Conley said. "He had a way of knowing which kids needed a little extra something."

Conley - recently honored as Idaho's Teacher of the Year - said bringing Bentley to school was a last-ditch effort to help one of her students.

"I had one extremely active child who was incapable of sitting still," she said, adding that she had already tried putting tape boundary lines on the floor around the student's desk. "Nothing seemed to work with him. You try rewards. You try punishment. It didn't work."

But Conley, a teacher at Coeur d'Alene's Canfield Middle School, had an idea, and it involved her dog: "If Johnny could sit for 15 minutes, he could walk Bentley around the playground."

It worked, and Conley said she learned something from Bentley.

"Kids need to feel accepted," she said. "That's what a dog does. It gives unconditional acceptance."

Conley said kids who know they're cared for are more likely to persevere and find success. She said that making connections with kids has become the most reward-



Jerome Pollos/Coeur d'Alene Press
Canfield Middle School teacher Paula Conley, center, was named 2005 Idaho Teacher of the Year in a surprise announcement by Superintendent of Public Instruction Marilyn Howard.

ing part of her job.

"A few months ago, I heard from a student I had in my first class, who is now in her 30s," Conley said, explaining that moments like this make teaching worthwhile.

But Conley added that connecting with students also has short-term benefits.

"When students hit glitches or hard

spots, they're willing to work through them with you if they have a relationship with you," she said. "It's building that connection with students and helping them to see how fun learning can be."

Conley said it's also hard work, adding that she sometimes gives up her weekends to grade papers. But it's worth the effort.

"Daily, you can see the enthusiasm, the

eagerness to be in the room and to participate in lessons," Conley said. "I get a lot of feedback from kids."

She said that feedback is proof she chose the right profession.

"I was born to teach," Conley said, looking back on her 23 years in the classroom. And she knew from a very young age that she would be a teacher.

"My great aunt was a teacher for the Air Force," Conley said. "She would be gone for five years at a time. (When) she came back to the states, she always stayed with my folks and me. I remember being totally fascinated by the stories she told of what she was doing."

At the time, Conley lived out her dream job with a chalkboard and workbooks and her childhood friends.

"I always played school," Conley said, "and I always had to be the teacher."

But Conley said the students she works with today are different from those her aunt taught at Air Force bases around the world.

"The rapid pace that life is being lived," Conley said. "Kids are far more worked. Their time is overscheduled with sports and music and lessons. They're always doing something. School is not always their number one priority."

But these students have many of the same needs that kids have always had for love, for safety, for space to be creative. That's what Conley tries to give them.

Madison first-grade teacher wins Milken prize

Peggy Rogers was troubled by the number of students coming into her fourth grade classroom who couldn't read. So she asked her principal for a chance to take on a first grade class for one year, hoping she would learn to teach beginning readers. But after one year in first grade, Rogers stayed for another year and then another and then another.

Now, 13 years later, Rogers is still teaching first grade students how to read at Rexburg's Burton Elementary, and she may never go back.

"I just wanted to go for a year, so I could learn to be a reading teacher," Rogers said. "I was amazed at how much I didn't know. I'm still learning." So are her students.

Rogers - a recent Milken Educator Award recipient - told the story of one student who found success learning to read.

"I had a little girl who had a brain injury," Rogers said. "We weren't sure if she would be successful in reading. We put her in one-on-one tutoring. I worked with this little girl for weeks and weeks."

Rogers said the girl, a first grade student, didn't seem to be making progress, but it soon became apparent that she had been soaking in everything Rogers taught.

"I remember the day it all came together for her," Rogers said. "She was excited."



Peggy Rogers, center holding check, poses with Superintendent of Public Instruction Marilyn Howard, Madison County School District Superintendent Geoffrey Thomas and other district officials after it was announced that Rogers would be receiving a \$25,000 Milken award.

Stories like this one keep Rogers in business, doing whatever she can to reach her students.

"When children come to school, and they're behind, you take what they know and build on what they know to take them into the unknown," Rogers said.

And Rogers knows she's not alone.

"Every teacher I know is dedicated to the cause of making children successful," she said. "Students are on teachers' minds all the time."

Rogers added that successful teachers have supportive communities, and she credited her fellow teachers for making it possible for her to win the Milken award.

"It speaks miles of my colleagues," Rogers said. "One teacher doesn't stand alone. You can't progress as a lonely teacher."

But Rogers was careful to point out that good teaching isn't just dependent on a strong community of teachers either. Rexburg has a lot of other people who are working for kids.

"The community is great," Rogers said. "Parents are involved. We've got really good administrators, and the support staff is great."

Rogers said that no matter how good the school is, however, there will always be students who struggle. One reason is the number of children who move in and out of the district each year.

"People are moving around much more than they were years ago," Rogers said, adding that there is pressure on teachers and other school staff to help new children catch up to the rest. And some students don't seem to want to catch up.

Rogers said good teachers know that sometimes the real obstacle is what's happening at home.

"I learned really quickly that I couldn't change their home lives," Rogers said.

But she could make a difference in her classroom. "I can make that environment safe," Rogers said. "I can help them feel equal."

Meridian third-grade teacher wins Milken prize

Dawn Nistal doesn't play favorites. She makes sure all her students get what they need. So when the third grade teacher at Meridian's Seven Oaks Elementary learned that one of her students couldn't speak, she knew what she needed to do: learn sign language. And to help the boy feel included, all her students are learning as well.

"The kids are excited to help this little boy and learn how they can speak through sign language," Nistal said. "The kids are learning sign language quicker than I am."

Nistal, one of Idaho's Milken Educator Award winners, explained that her students understand the difference between fairness and favoritism because she has taken time to discuss with them that some students have special needs.

"It shows them that there is no favoritism," Nistal said. "It makes kids more compassionate."

Her efforts have made a difference for one student.

Nistal said this boy now has friends in her classroom who spend time with him in and out of school.

But Nistal is careful to point out that she doesn't stand alone.

"Seven Oaks is a miniature utopia," Nistal said. "We have high-achieving stu-



Dawn Nistal, holding the left side of the check poses with Superintendent of Public Instruction Marilyn Howard and district officials after it was announced that Nistal would be receiving a \$25,000 Milken award.

dents paired with very supportive parents, and we have the largest parent-teacher association in the state of Idaho. We have a lot of funding for our school."

Seven Oaks also has good teachers.

"Teachers here work really hard to meet the needs of all learners," Nistal said. "All the teachers here are awesome, and I just happened to get this wonderful award. I

can't receive all the credit. I can think of a lot of people who deserve this award."

Nistal will receive the award, along with a large cash prize, at a formal reception in Washington, D.C., this spring. Nistal said she will put some of the money in savings, use part of it for a classroom pizza party and send a large portion to the school where she grew up, Boise's William Howard Taft

Elementary.

It was while attending Taft that Nistal decided to become a teacher.

"In first grade, my teacher made a huge impression on me," Nistal said. "When I student taught, I requested to student teach with her. It was just so fun to teach with her and learn from her."

Nistal said she was surprised to learn that her first grade teacher still experienced being nervous on the first day of school, after years of teaching.

"She still had every ounce of passion for teaching," Nistal said, adding that she hopes to maintain a similar sense of joy for her profession.

But it's hard to stay motivated in a job that requires so much. Nistal said she commonly spends 12 hours or more at school each day and averages six hours each week-end, grading papers or planning lessons.

The students keep her motivated.

"These kids are motivated to learn," Nistal said. "You have a sense of not wanting to let them down or their families. You think about helping that child go the extra mile."

And for Nistal, there's a sense that what she's doing really matters: "Children are the future, and I want the future to be the best that it can be."

IDAHO STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
News & Reports (USPS 940120)
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Boise, Idaho 83720-0027

TO:

"News & Reports" (ISSN 1049-2437) is published quarterly by the State Department of Education, Office of Administration, 650 W. State St., Boise ID 83702. Free to all subscribers by the State Department of Education. Periodical class postage paid at Boise, ID.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to "News and Reports," State Department of Education, Office of Administration, P.O. Box 83720, Boise, ID 83720-0027. Mail to:

Editor: Allison L. Westfall
State Superintendent of Public Instruction:
Dr. Marilyn Howard

"News & Reports" is published in partial fulfillment of federal requirements for the dissemination of information and activities under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.



STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION WINTER 2004 VOL. 32, NO. 4, BOISE, ID

NEWS & REPORTS

www.sde.state.id.us/dept

A message from the state superintendent

Thank you for all you do for children

This is the season of traditions, and one of ours at the State Department of Education is to use the year's final "News & Reports" issue to celebrate successes and thank those who made them possible.

As busy educators, we rarely pause to celebrate the wonderful things we do. In this issue, you'll learn about Idaho's new Teacher of the Year, the latest Idaho recipients of Milken National Educators awards, the Idahoan named National Middle School Principal of the Year, and others who have earned special recognition.

Yet, in almost every instance, these outstanding teachers and administrators tell us they consider themselves representative of their colleagues. They remind us that we find excellence throughout our public school system.

Here are a few of the unsung heroes who deserve our thanks this year:

--All of the talented educators from around the state who share their experience and expertise as we develop new programs, standards, curriculum guides, surveys, and so on. It's hard to imagine how we could get along without them, and without their commitment to making sure Idaho's students have the benefit of the best ideas and practices.

Our teachers have high expectations. We see that in the thoughtful items they write for the Direct Math and Direct Writing assessments, in the questions developed for the Idaho Standards Achievement Test, and in their ideas for end-of-course assessments.

Here at the SDE, we know the value of instructional time. So we make every effort to ensure that when teachers come to work on these projects, they leave with a rewarding professional development experience that includes ample time to collaborate with their colleagues.

--District administrators and trustees who approve their teachers' involvement in these statewide projects. We know that for every teacher joining a statewide team, someone



**Dr. Marilyn Howard
Superintendent of Public
Instruction**

"back home" has to make special arrangements, and districts often bear the cost of lending their staffs to these projects.

Yet the results are worth it. No out-of-state "expert" can duplicate Idaho teachers' knowledge of what works best in Idaho schools.

--The pioneers who take that first step into the unknown. I'm thinking now of all of those involved in the initial stages of the Idaho Student Information Management System: the pilot districts, the teachers, the ISIMS team members, the J.A. and Kathryn Albertson Foundation, and many others.

Like most brand-new and major projects, ISIMS has run into some bumps along the way. That was to be expected.

Think back for a moment to the early days of the Idaho Reading Initiative: the first time the indicator was administered, the first identification

of struggling readers, the first offering of the extended year program. I particularly remember the public release of the first results and all the hand-wringing over the poor reading skills among our youngest students.

Now, all these years later, not only have the scores improved - another cause for celebration - but the initiative has become an integral part of our Kindergarten and primary-grade program. In time, ISIMS, too, will be fully integrated into the day-to-day operation of our schools.

--The staff here at the State Department of Education. These past few years have been a time of enormous change as the SDE staff juggled new achievement standards, new testing requirements, new federal guidelines to implement the new No Child Left Behind Act, and new State Board of Education policies on how to handle federal funds and programs.

But through it all, the staff here has maintained its fundamental commitment to helping schools help students, and it has shown a willingness to shift from "business as usual" to new approaches to these new issues.

For example, if you were one of the more than 1,000 educators who attended this past fall's data academies, you saw the collaboration among SDE staff members from the bureaus of curriculum and accountability, special education, and Title I federal programs. The tasks ahead are so great that titles and organizational charts matter less than working together to provide the most useful information.

I wish it were possible to thank every one of you who contributed to our common goal of improving learning for all students.

But perhaps even better is to ask each of you to start a new tradition of taking time to say a special "thank you" to those among your colleagues who have gone that extra mile to serve the children of Idaho. I can't think of a better ending for the year.

Alternate ways to measure student success

Editor's note: The Winter 2004 edition of News & Reports featured an article about the efforts of southern Idaho districts to create a tool to assist districts in evaluating high school students who do not pass the 10th grade ISAT. This article reviews alternative graduation efforts from northern Idaho.

By Jerry Keane
Post Falls School District

During the past year the Region I Superintendents Association and the Idaho Association of School Administrators have worked together to develop model policy and an associated application protocol for students to demonstrate academic success in ways other than by showing proficiency on the Idaho Standards Achievement Test.

This effort was launched to give students who are not showing proficiency on the ISAT hope that they may be able to graduate from high school by following a rigorous alternative route toward a diploma.

The State Board of Education Rules define graduation requirements and allow districts to develop a "locally established mechanism" for a student to demonstrate proficiency via an alternative route to graduation (IDAPA 08.02.03 Rule 105.03).

As a result, a model Alternative Route to Graduation plan has been developed that could be modified to fit almost any district's needs. The plan allows a student to demonstrate proficiency in different ways:

*Complete the local graduation requirements and achieve proficiency on the ISAT, or

*Complete local graduation requirements and achieve success with multiple factors that evaluate academic proficiency and individual performance.

These factors may include the following depending on a district's preference:

*Assessment scores including the ISAT, Direct Writing Assessment, and district-developed literacy assessment.

*Performance measures that may include performance entries into a student portfolio or senior projects, PAMs and other locally developed performance measures, and grade point average.

*Complete local graduation requirements and demonstrate proficiency on Performance Assessment Measures (PAMs) in specific sub-skills where the student has not shown ISAT proficiency.

(The PAMs are currently being developed and were discussed in an article in the last publication of the State Department of Education News and Report.)

For example, in the Post Falls School District a student, his parents and staff will develop a specific plan related to how he will demonstrate proficiency. The plan may include components of all three of above categories.

Another district may decide it wants to focus on student portfolios as the alternative measurement of proficiency, and yet another may choose to use the Performance Assessment Measures (PAMs) as the only alternative available to students.

The model policy does allow for individual district flexibility in the application

of an alternative graduation plan. The one thing that we do know at this time is that the specific application protocol will change as we apply the standards to real students.

There is an urgency for districts to adopt plans to help those students who may need to explore alternatives to ISAT proficiency. The new ISAT graduation requirements will apply to this year's juniors and all subsequent classes. These alternatives directly support the goal of having all students who receive a diploma from an Idaho public high school demonstrate that they have the skills and knowledge to be productive and responsible citizens.

As we know, people have different strengths and aptitudes that will allow them to be successful in a variety of ways.

In the Post Falls School District we project that a relatively small number of students will appeal to our local school board for waivers to the ISAT proficiency requirements. However, it is critical that a student who is truly working hard toward meeting the requirements of a diploma stay in school to achieve that end result.

The Alternative Route to Graduation plans are just one more way to help students reach their goals. If you are interested in the specifics of the model policy and/or the application protocol, please e-mail me at jkeane@sd273.k12.id.us.

Jerry Keane also is the president-elect of the Idaho School Superintendents Association.

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